



# Marketing and Enrollment Management Benchmarks 2025

Trends in Higher Education Marketing  
and Student Engagement



# Foreword

As we enter 2025, the landscape of higher education marketing continues a rapid transformation. Our marketing benchmarks are designed to guide institutions through the increasing complexities of the student journey so they can adapt to the evolving dynamics of student engagement.

Throughout this report, we identify the trends shaping this landscape. By contextualizing these changes, we can better anticipate the needs of Modern Learners and align strategies accordingly.

Agility is key. Institutions must act responsively in an ever-evolving and increasingly sophisticated world. Reputation and engagement are hard won and must be earned continuously.

In an era when competition is intense and students are both discerning and diverse, understanding their journey is crucial. Full-funnel media strategies touch prospective students across various platforms, including emerging channels. This approach not only broadens reach but also enriches content to match the varied preferences of today's learners.

The rise of stealth applicants presents both a challenge and an opportunity. This trend encourages institutions to refine media spending strategies to justify investments and connect with these elusive prospects. Understanding program demand allows institutions to tailor offerings to meet the specific interests of students.

Finally, longitudinal trends offer insights into how student behaviors and preferences shift over time. Embracing these overarching themes and recommendations positions institutions for success in the coming years while fostering a more inclusive and responsive higher education environment.



# Introduction

We stand at the cusp of a pivotal moment in higher education — the Era of the Modern Learner. This new era, characterized by shifting student priorities, evolving technology, and changing cultural dynamics, is reshaping how colleges and universities engage with students. Our [2025 Landscape of Higher Education Report](#) detailed these emerging trends, providing a foundational understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing institutions. This report builds upon that foundation, diving deeper into the specific implications of these trends, particularly the rise of the Modern Learner and the need for a Unified Enrollment Approach.

Since Spring 2020, part-time undergraduates are getting younger, while part-time graduate students are trending older. While traditional student enrollment experienced a slight decline in Fall 2024, non-traditional enrollment increased 3 percent, indicating a shift in how people pursue education. This, coupled with rising enrollment across all sectors, indicates that age no longer dictates learning style.

This is underscored by a surge in enrollment at community colleges and public institutions. The growing popularity of certificates and alternative credentials, which offer cost-effective and career-focused options, demonstrates a need for education that directly addresses workplace skills gaps. These trends taken together, along with the increasing preference for flexible learning pathways, show that students of all ages are seeking out options that will lead to financial viability.

The current period of transformation is also marked by a wave of closures and mergers, with a total of 89 institutions closing or merging this year alone. Financial struggles and declining enrollments are primary contributing factors to this trend. As traditional marketing and enrollment management methods lose their effectiveness and competition intensifies, colleges and universities are striving to find sustainable solutions that will enable them to diversify academic programs and expand course offerings.



# Introduction continued

The Modern Learner is discerning, using data and online resources to research programs and institutions. They are highly informed and goal-oriented, demand personalized experiences, and crave educational options that offer a true return on investment. This hyper-focused need to obtain practical skills and financial viability for their futures is the backbone of their school choices.

To succeed in the Era of the Modern Learner, institutions need to move beyond traditional approaches that rely on basic demographics to drive their strategies. A Unified Enrollment Approach that integrates marketing and communications across the entire campus and reaches all audiences with a consistent brand message. While there are distinctions between student groups, there are many commonalities that bind them together as Modern Learners.



# 2025 Marketing Benchmarks

## A Shifting Landscape Designed to Fit the Modern Learner

The changing landscape of higher education marketing is driven by technological advancements, evolving student priorities, and the emergence of the Modern Learner. Institutions seeking success must adapt their strategies to effectively engage this new generation of students, who are more informed, discerning, and goal-oriented than ever before.

Organic search remains a highly cost-effective way to attract prospective students, with more than a third of all education website visits originating from organic search. Institutions are also increasing their investment in digital advertising, particularly on platforms like Google, social media, and mobile video.

Video content has become an essential tool for engaging prospective students, especially on social media. Short-form video formats, such as Reels and Stories, are particularly effective for capturing attention and driving interaction.

AI-powered tools, including Google's Performance Max, are helping institutions optimize their advertising campaigns and personalize content delivery.

The Modern Learner is highly cost-conscious and demands clear information about tuition, fees and financial aid options. They are also increasingly focused on career outcomes and want to understand how their chosen program will prepare them for the workforce. As a result, institutions are focusing on providing transparency and demonstrating value.

To succeed in the new landscape, institutions must provide detailed program descriptions, highlight career outcomes for graduates, and showcase student success stories. They offer tailored messaging and flexible learning pathways to accommodate the diverse needs and preferences of Modern Learners.



## What Prospective Students are Seeking

Modern Learners seek clear, comprehensive, and transparent information to assess the value and suitability of a college or university for their individual needs and career aspirations.

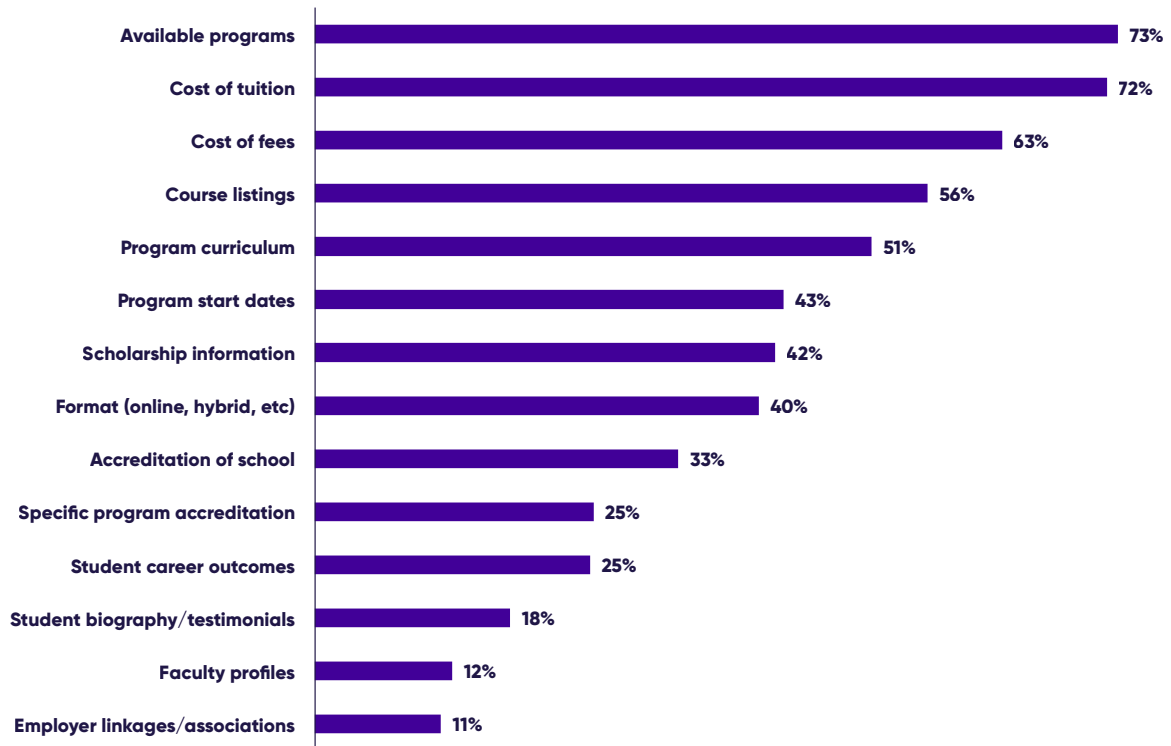
Key areas include:

- Cost Transparency:** Prospective students are very cost-conscious. They want clear information about financial commitments before applying.
- Available Programs:** Institutions should prominently showcase a diverse range of offerings for students in search of tailored educational pathways that align with their career goals.
- Program Curriculum and Course Listings:** Learners want to understand the specifics of what they will be studying. Detailed descriptions help them make informed decisions about their education.
- Program Start Dates and Formats:** Students look for flexibility and clear timelines. This is especially relevant for non-traditional students balancing education with work or family commitments.
- Accreditation Information:** Modern Learners are concerned about the quality and recognition of their education, which can impact job prospects after graduation.
- Career Outcomes:** There is a strong desire for practical, career-oriented education. Prospective students want to know how their chosen programs will affect their future job prospects.
- Testimonials and Faculty Profiles:** While slightly less prioritized, testimonials from current students and faculty profiles help prospective students gauge the community and support they can expect.
- Employer Linkages:** Connections with potential employers can enhance the appeal of a program, though it may not be a primary concern for all students.



# What Prospective Students are Seeking

## What Are Prospective Students Looking For on Your Website



Source: [EducationDynamics Online College Students Survey 2024](#)

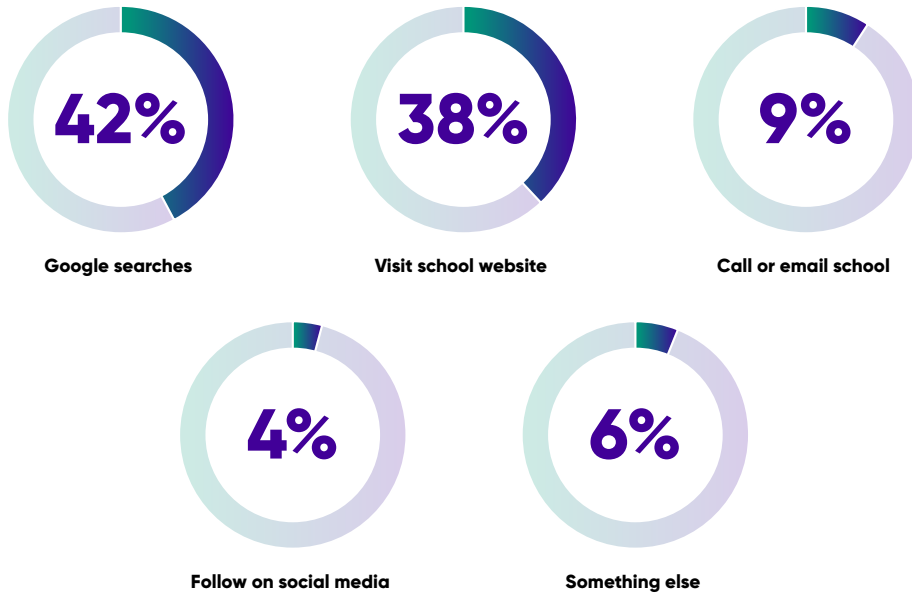




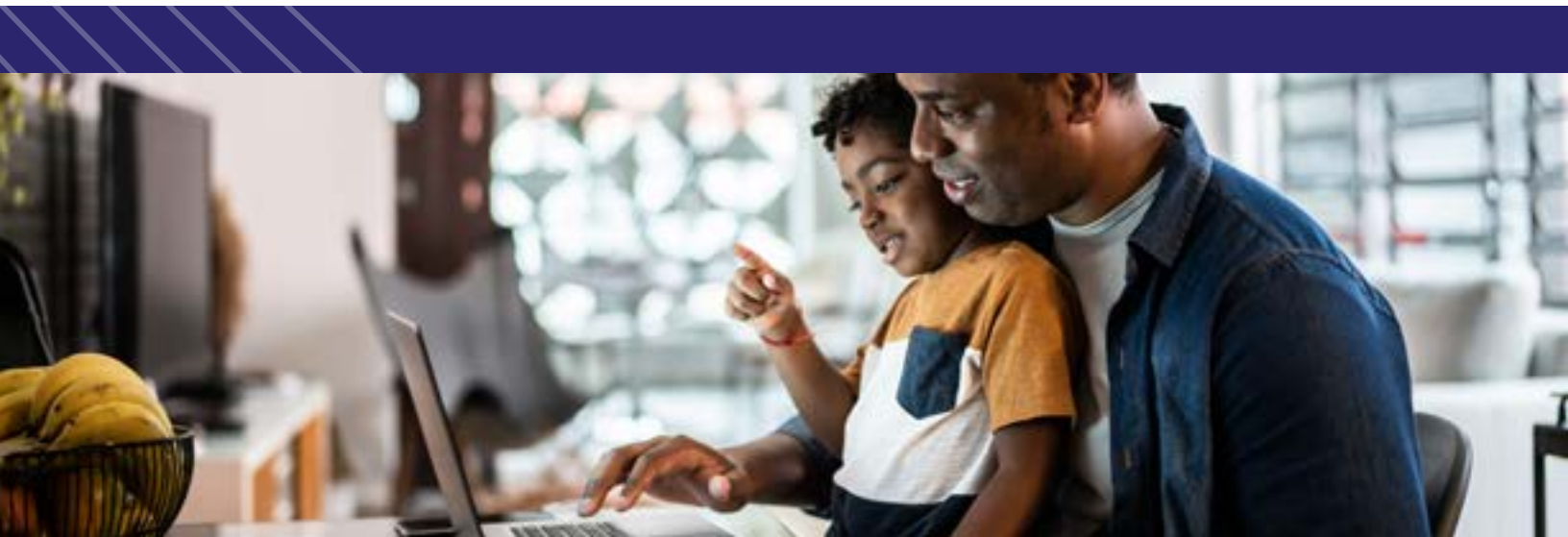
## Research Process for Prospective Students

Many students start their school selection process by searching on Google or directly visiting the school's website. These initial steps help them gather essential information and form the foundation of their opinion of the institution.

### Where Prospective Students Begin Their Research Process



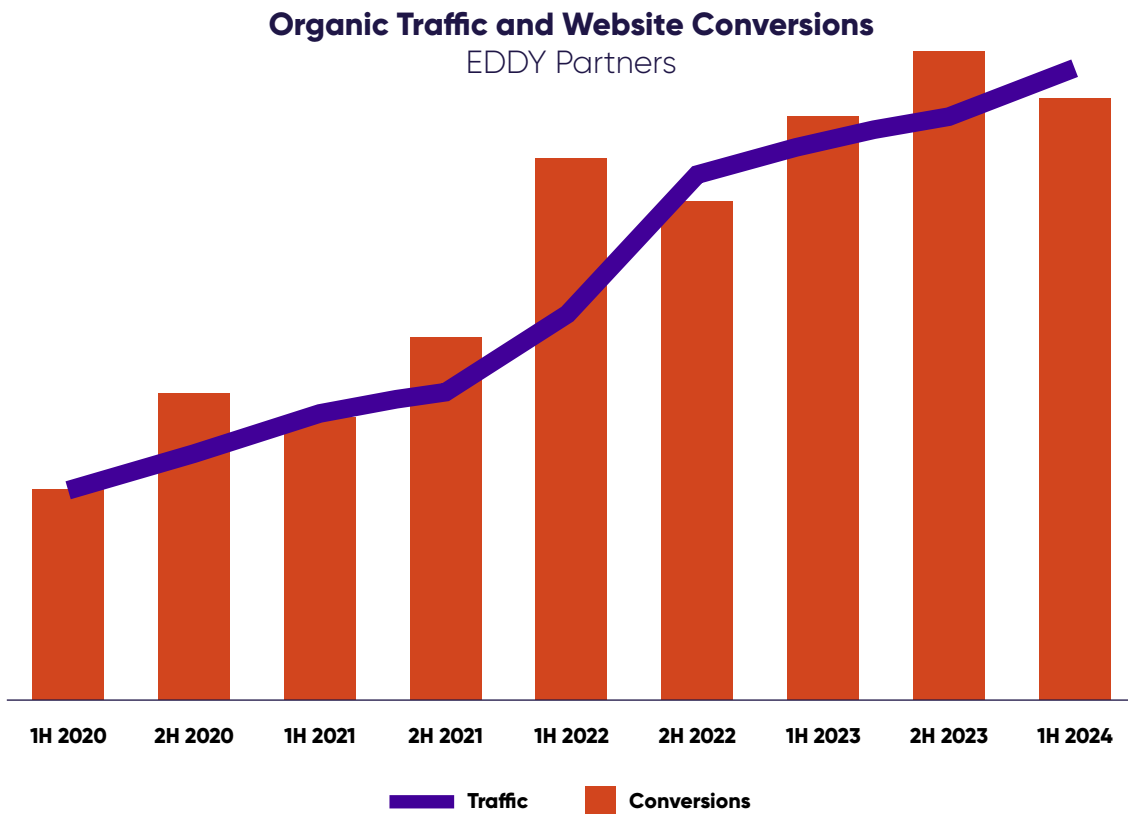
Source: [EducationDynamics Online College Students Survey 2024](#)





# Organic Search

Year-over-year, EducationDynamics partners have seen average organic traffic increase by 12%, with website conversions up by 15%. As the search landscape evolves, prioritizing website performance and correctly valuing the impact of your website on enrollment is critical to overall marketing success.



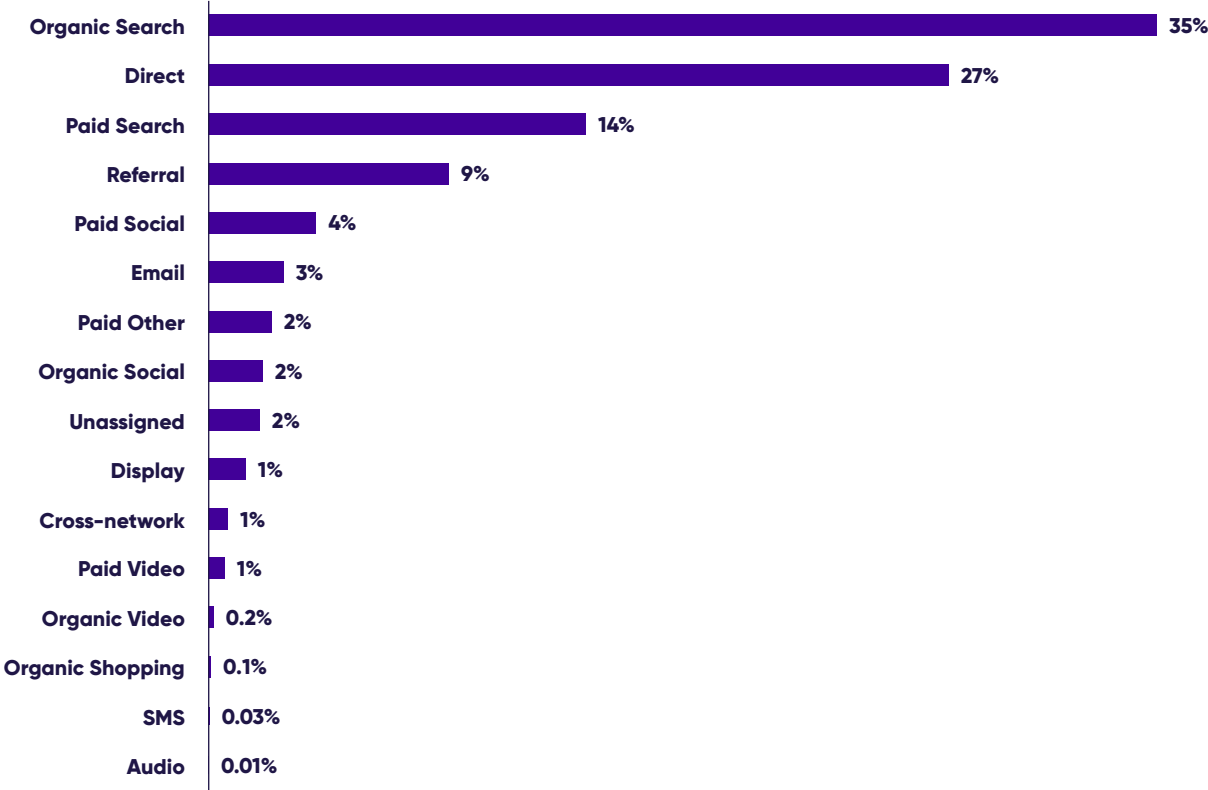
Source: EducationDynamics Proprietary Data



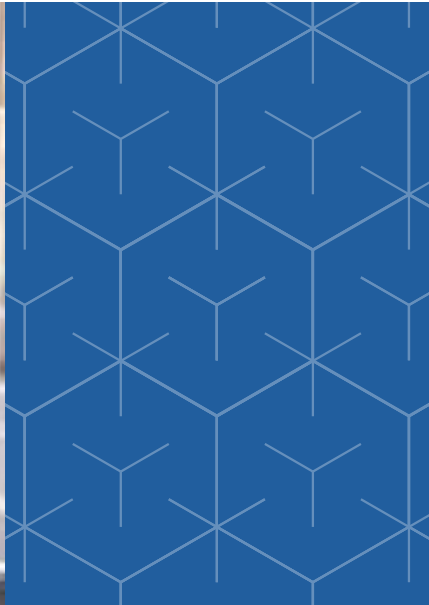


35% of all education website visits originate from organic search. Organic search remains highly cost-effective and often more efficient in the long-term, compared to traffic from social media, paid media and other traffic-generating channels.

### 2024 Traffic Default Channel Group



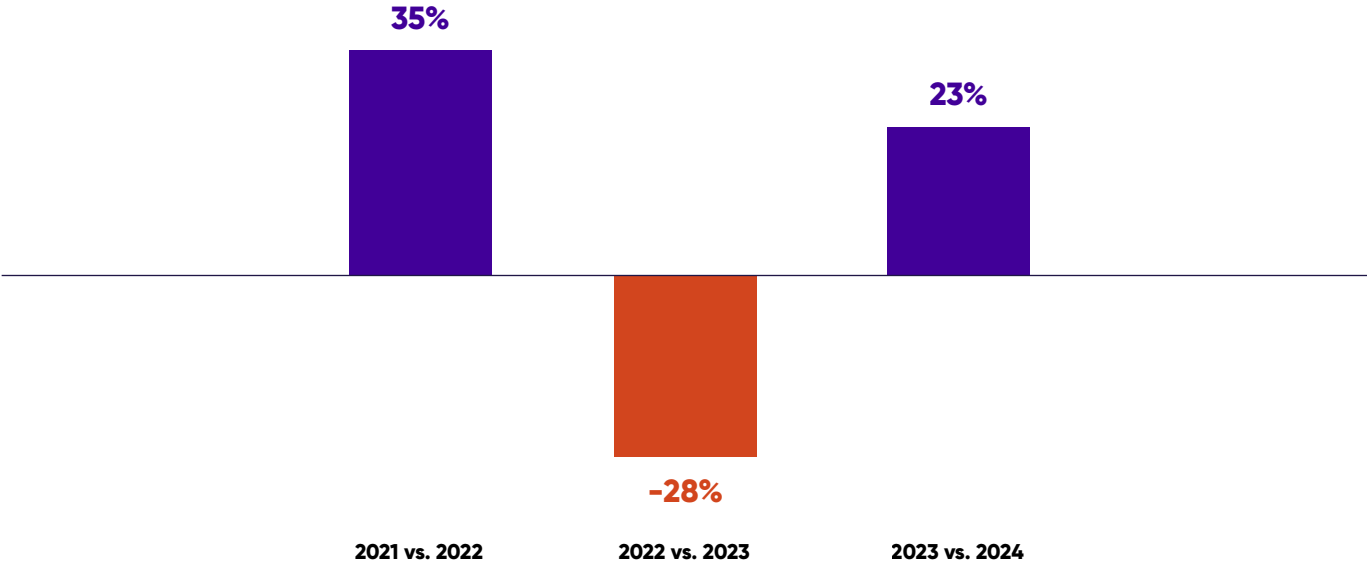
Source: EducationDynamics Proprietary Data





Pageviews increased 23% from 2023-2024, with an average of 2.27 page views per session. Engaging content, content structure, improved user experience and returning visitors can all increase pageviews.

### Year-Over-Year Pageviews Per Session Percent Change



Source: EducationDynamics Proprietary Data

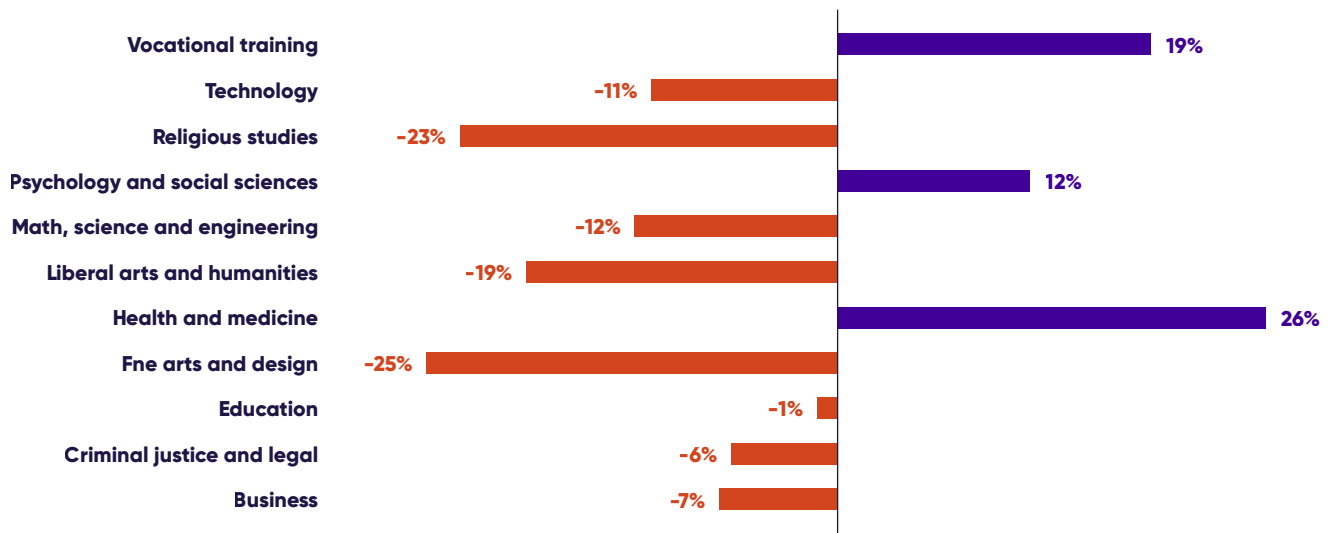




## Site Demand

Monitoring site traffic helps identify programs that may be in high demand. Health and medicine programs have seen a 26% traffic increase, reflecting a growing focus on healthcare, while vocational training has risen by 19%, indicating a shift toward practical skills and direct employment pathways. Conversely, areas such as fine arts and design (-25%), religious studies (-23%), and liberal arts and humanities (-19%) have experienced declines, suggesting students may prefer fields perceived as more job-ready. Additionally, slight decreases in business, criminal justice, and technology point to potential saturation in these areas.

### Site Traffic: 2023 vs. 2024 Subject Demand Growth



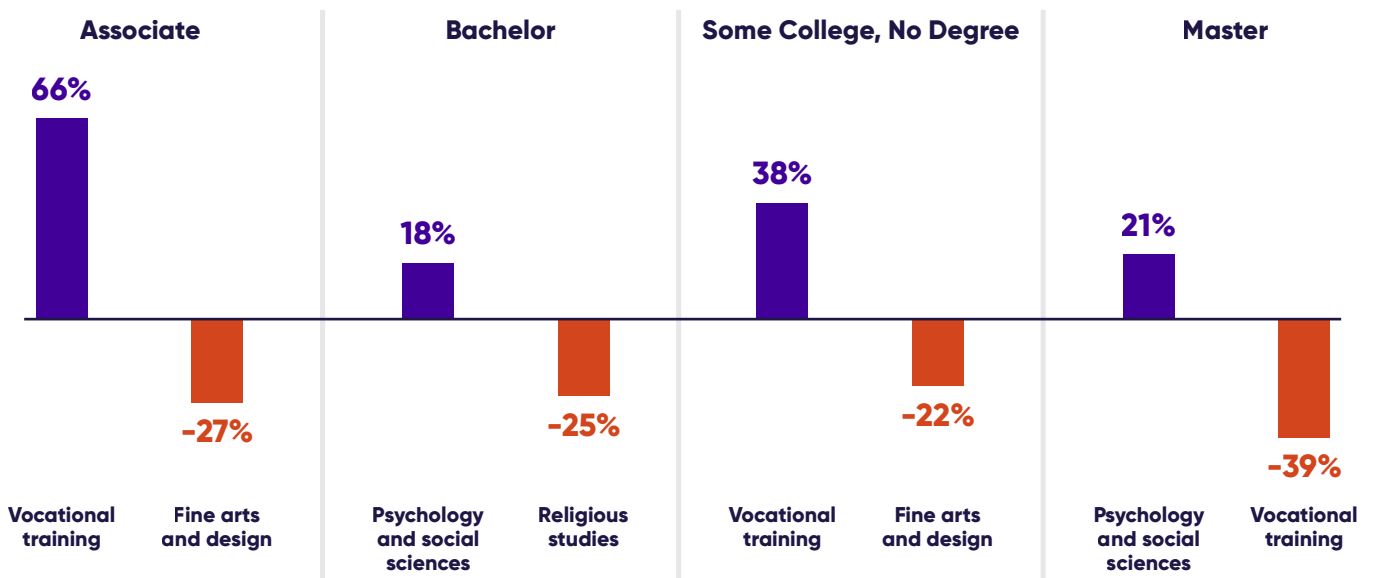
Source: EducationDynamics Proprietary Data





Traffic data this year indicates a significant shift towards vocational training and psychology-related programs, particularly at the associate and bachelor's levels, where demand has increased markedly. In contrast, traditional arts and humanities fields, such as fine arts and religious studies, are facing declines across all degree levels, suggesting that students are prioritizing pathways with clearer career prospects.

### 2023 vs. 2024 Highest Growth and Erosion Subject Areas by Degree Level



Source: EducationDynamics Proprietary Data

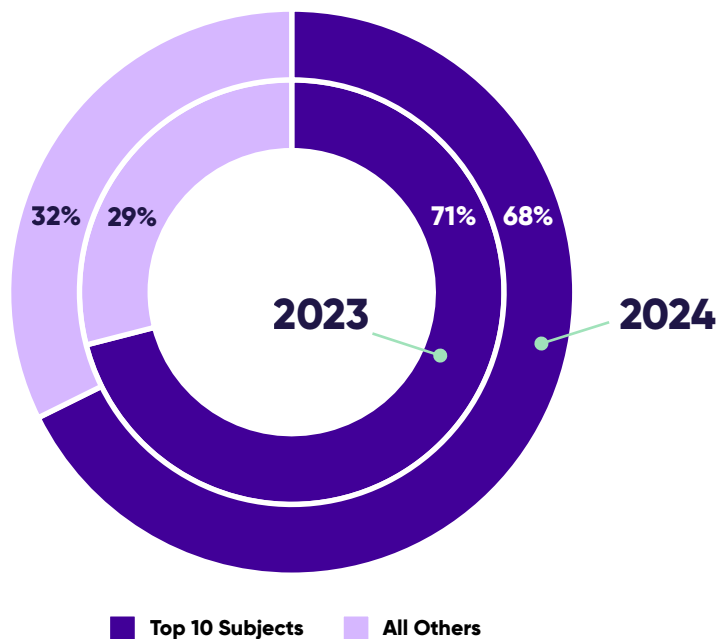




## Inquiry Demand

Potential students searched for slightly different subjects in 2024, with the top 10 subjects accounting for approximately 68% of all inquiry demand. This concentration suggests that institutions should focus their resources and outreach efforts on these popular subjects to better meet the needs and preferences of learners.

### 2023 vs. 2024 Inquiry Composition: Top 10 Subjects as a Percentage of All Inquiries



Source: EducationDynamics Proprietary Data

The fields with the highest year-over-year increases in student inquiries are healthcare, veterinary/animal science, and math/statistics. This surge in interest reflects the growing demand for professionals in these areas. As students seek careers with strong job prospects and societal impact, these disciplines are becoming increasingly popular choices.

### Year-Over-Year Highest Subject Demand Increases



13%



61%



35%

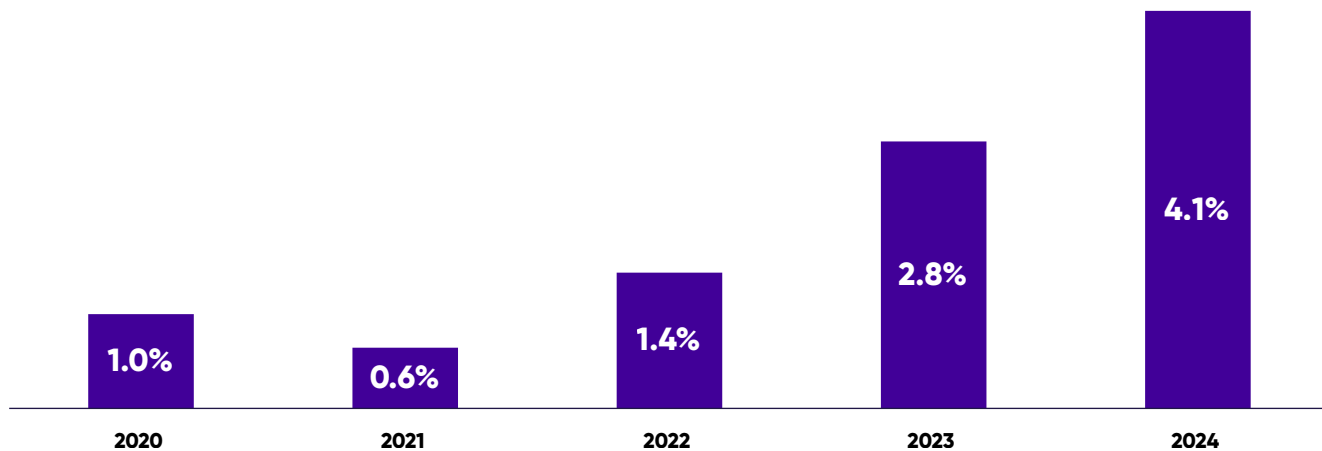
Source: EducationDynamics Proprietary Data



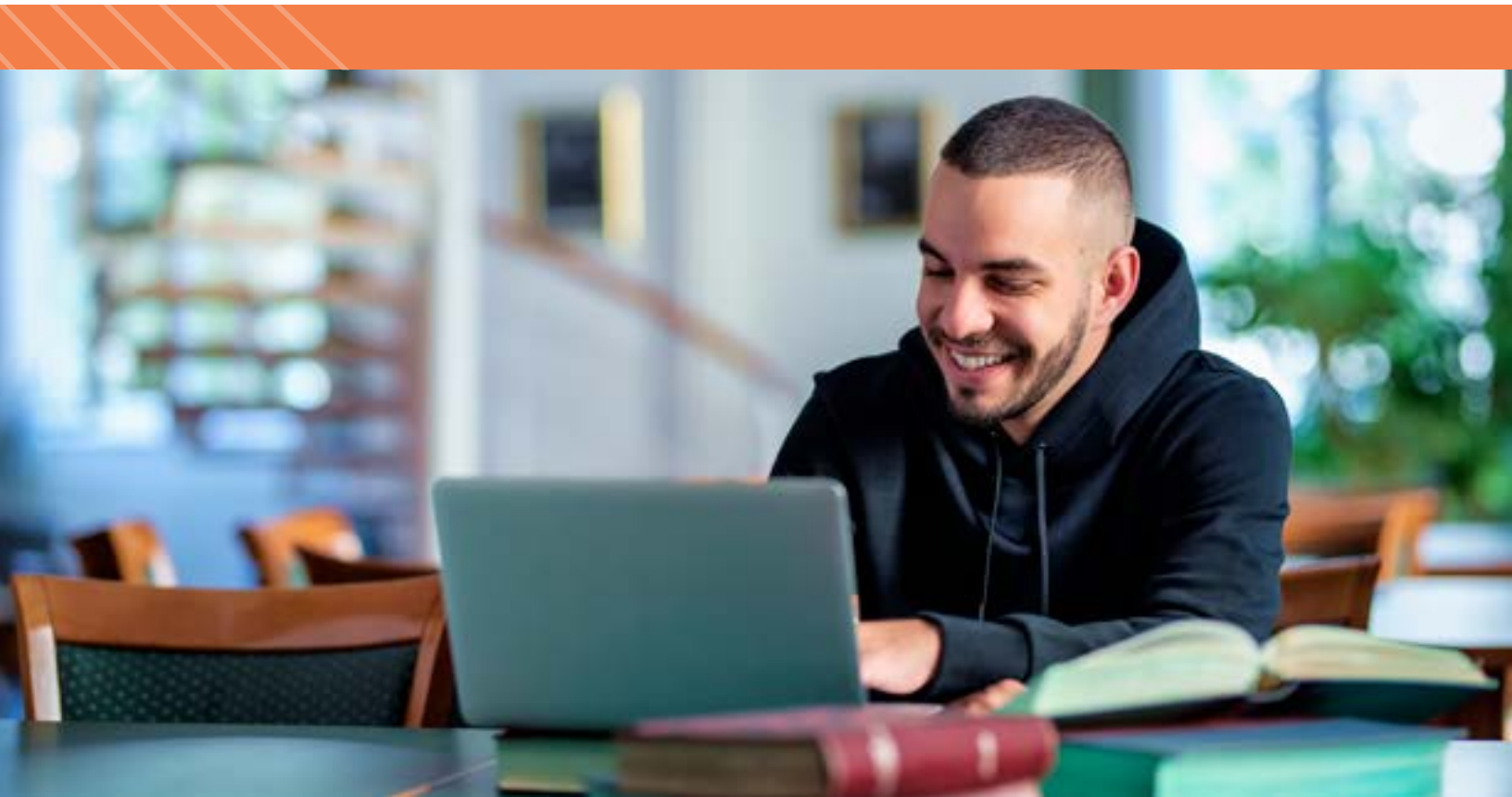
## The Rise of Stealth Applicants

Many students prefer to explore their college options without the pressure of being contacted by admissions offices. Instead of filling out contact forms, they submit applications directly—a strategy known as stealth applying—allowing them to maintain privacy throughout their search.

**Stealth Applicants 2020-2024**



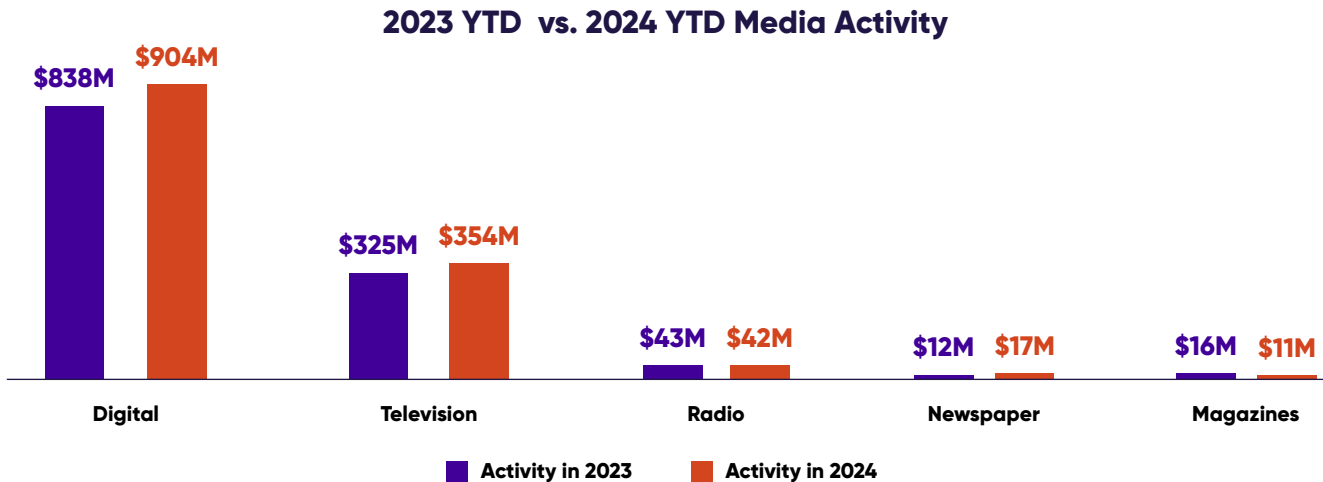
Source: EducationDynamics Proprietary Data





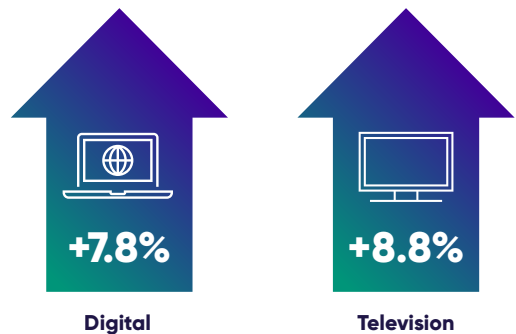
# Media Insights

On average, roughly \$115 million is spent on education advertising each month. Total expenditures by educational advertisers increased by \$91 million from January to mid-October 2024, compared to the same period in the previous year.



Source: Vivvix (formerly Advertising Insights | Strategy), Jan 2023-Oct 2023 vs. Jan 2024-Oct 2024

Most notably, digital advertising spend has increased by 7.8%, while television advertising has seen a rise of 8.8%. This trend underscores the commitment of education advertisers to invest in media channels that are most effective for driving awareness and conversion.

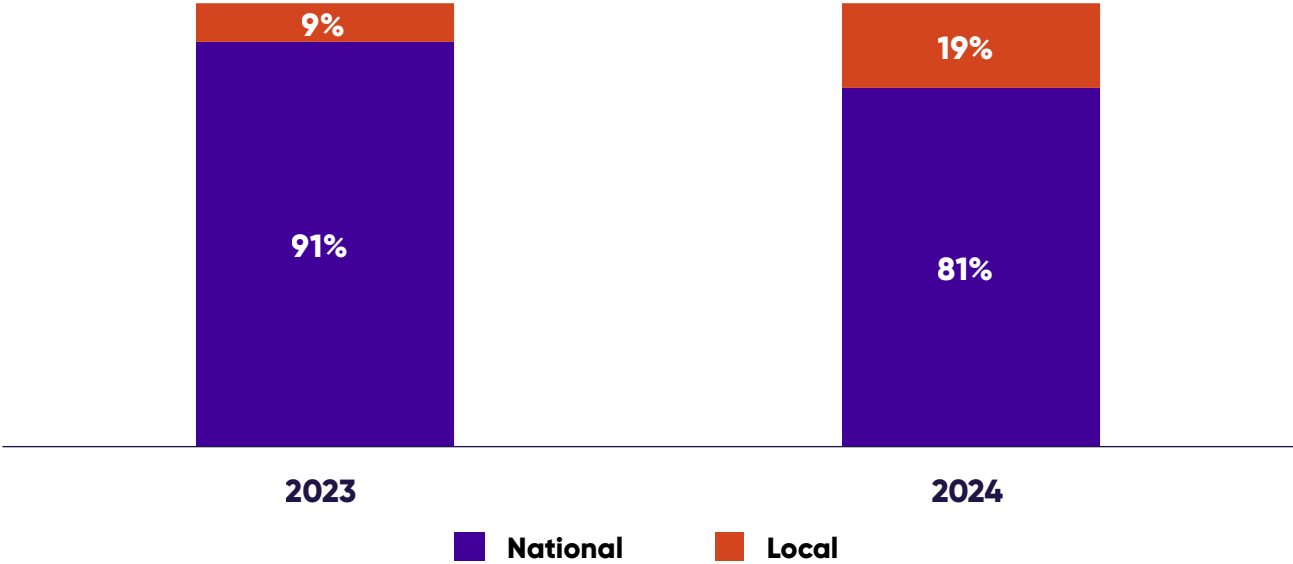


Source: Vivvix (formerly Advertising Insights | Strategy), Jan 2023-Oct 2023 vs. Jan 2024-Oct 2024



There has been a significant shift toward more localized spending, with the proportion of local expenditures rising from 9% last year to 19% this year.

### 2023 YTD vs. 2024 YTD Local vs. National Spend

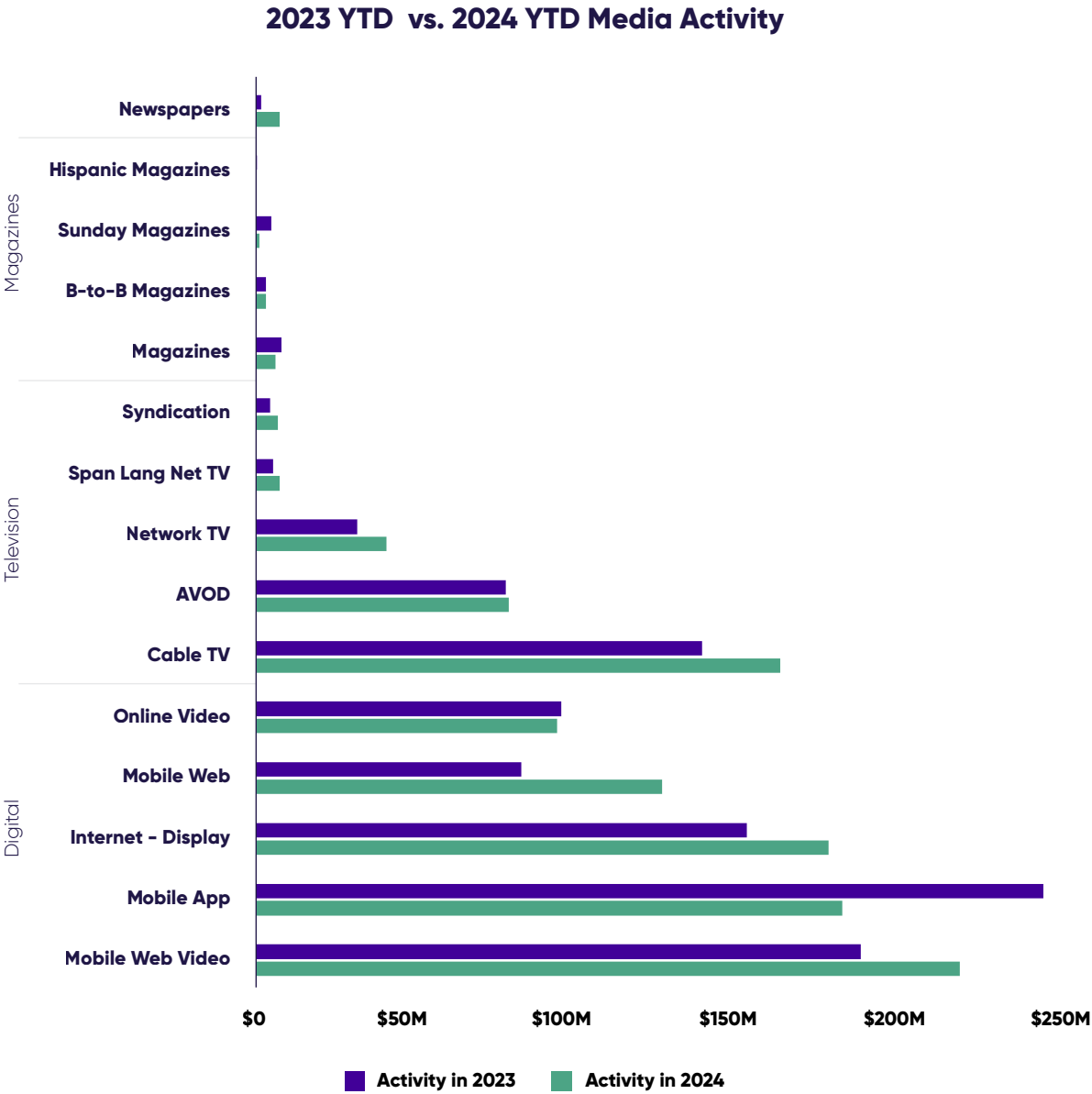


Source: Vivvix (formerly Advertising Insights | Strategy), Jan 2023-Oct 2023 vs. Jan 2024-Oct 2024





This year has brought significant shifts in local advertising channels, particularly in Cable TV, Internet Display, Mobile Web Video, and Network TV. These changes underscore evolving consumer behaviors and the growing significance of digital platforms to effectively reach prospective students. While traditional television has experienced declines in viewership, it still presents some opportunities for local advertising, particularly for educational institutions seeking to engage with their target audiences.

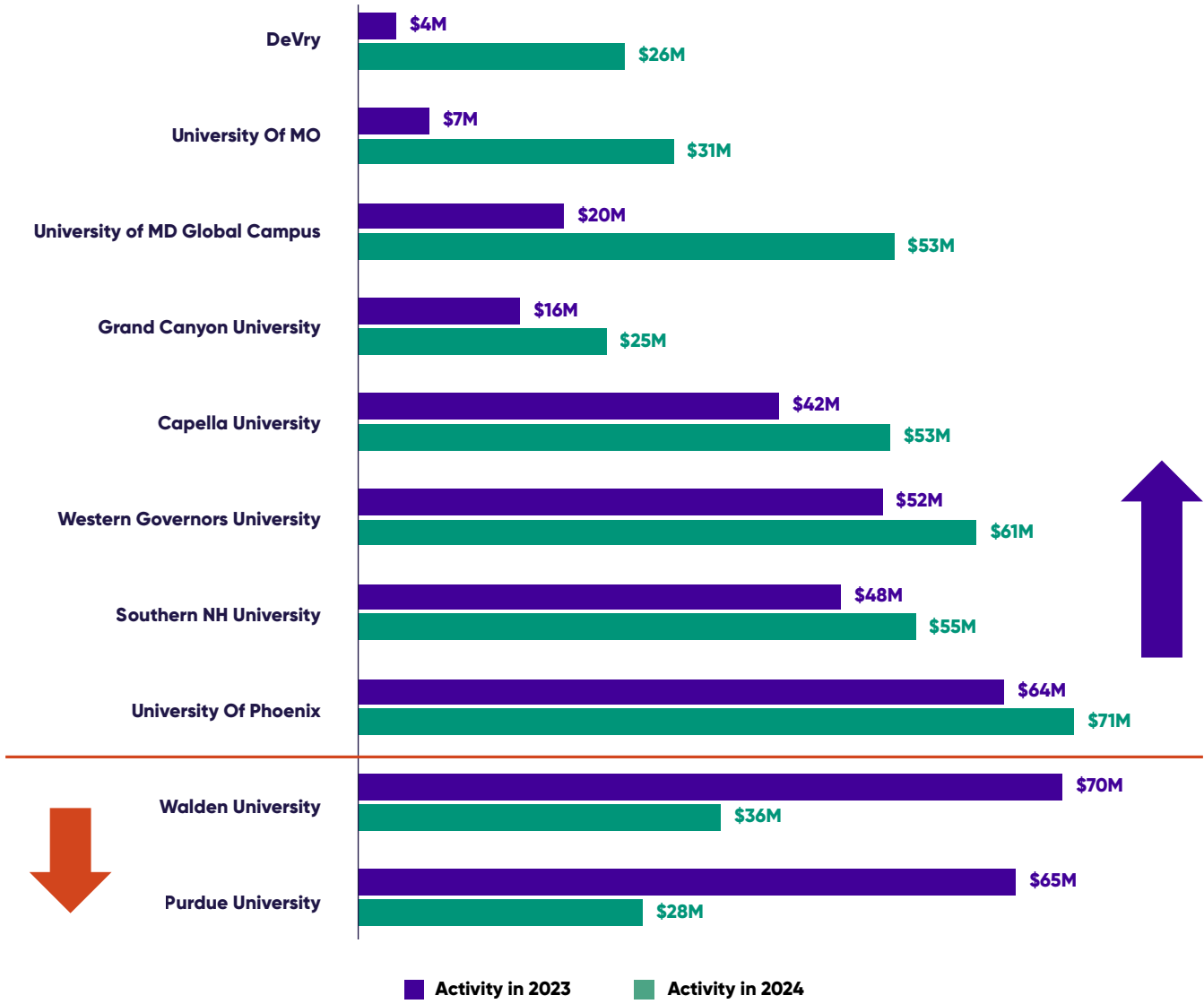


Source: Vivvix (formerly Advertising Insights | Strategy), Jan 2023-Oct 2023 vs. Jan 2024-Oct 2024



Among the top Education Advertisers, year-to-date, the University of Phoenix (UoP) and seven other major advertisers have increased their media spending compared to the same period last year. In contrast, two major advertisers, Purdue University and Walden University, have significantly reduced their expenditures.

### 2023 YTD vs. 2024 YTD Total Measured Media Spend



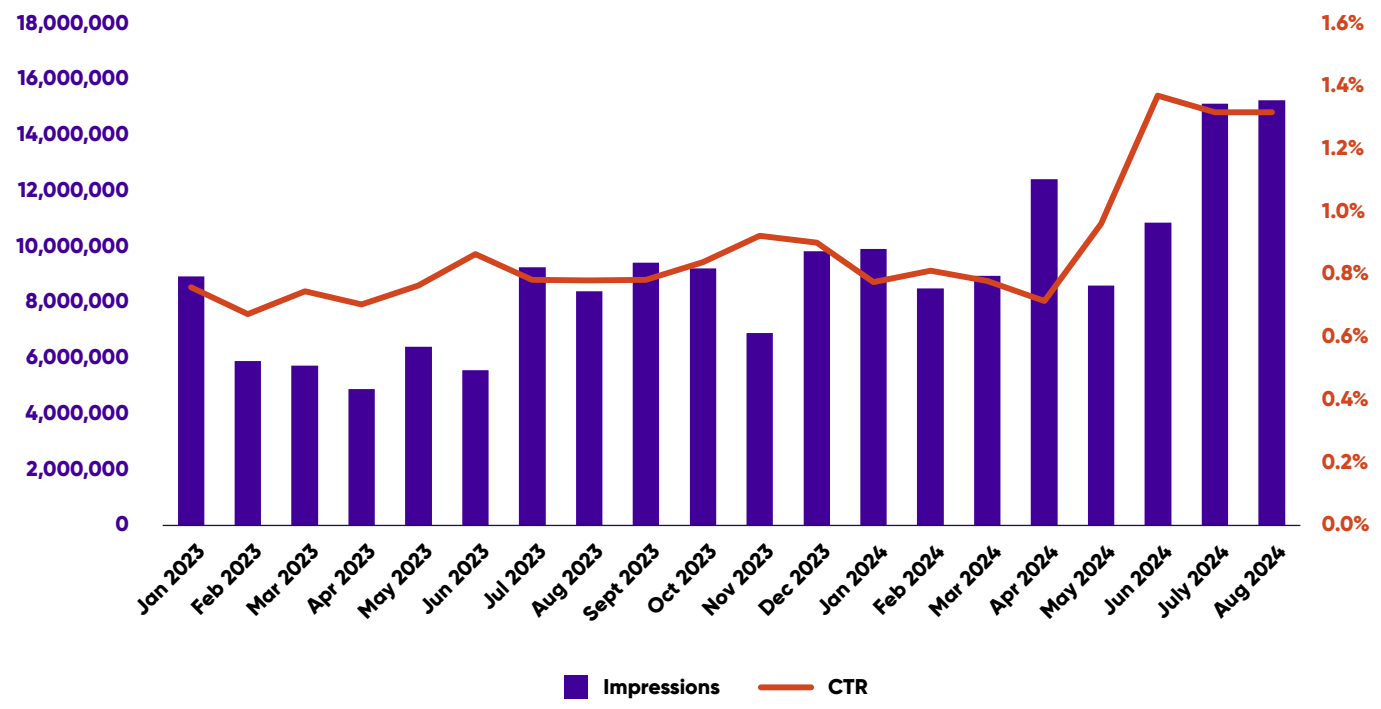
Source: Vivvix (formerly Advertising Insights | Stradegy), Jan 2023-Oct 2023 vs. Jan 2024-Oct 2024



# Paid Social

EducationDynamics partners are fully embracing video content and witnessing a significant boost in ad engagement as a result. This shift not only enhances the overall user experience but also fosters deeper connections with prospective students, leveraging the power of video to drive brand awareness and interaction.

### Video Impressions and Click-Through Rate Over Time



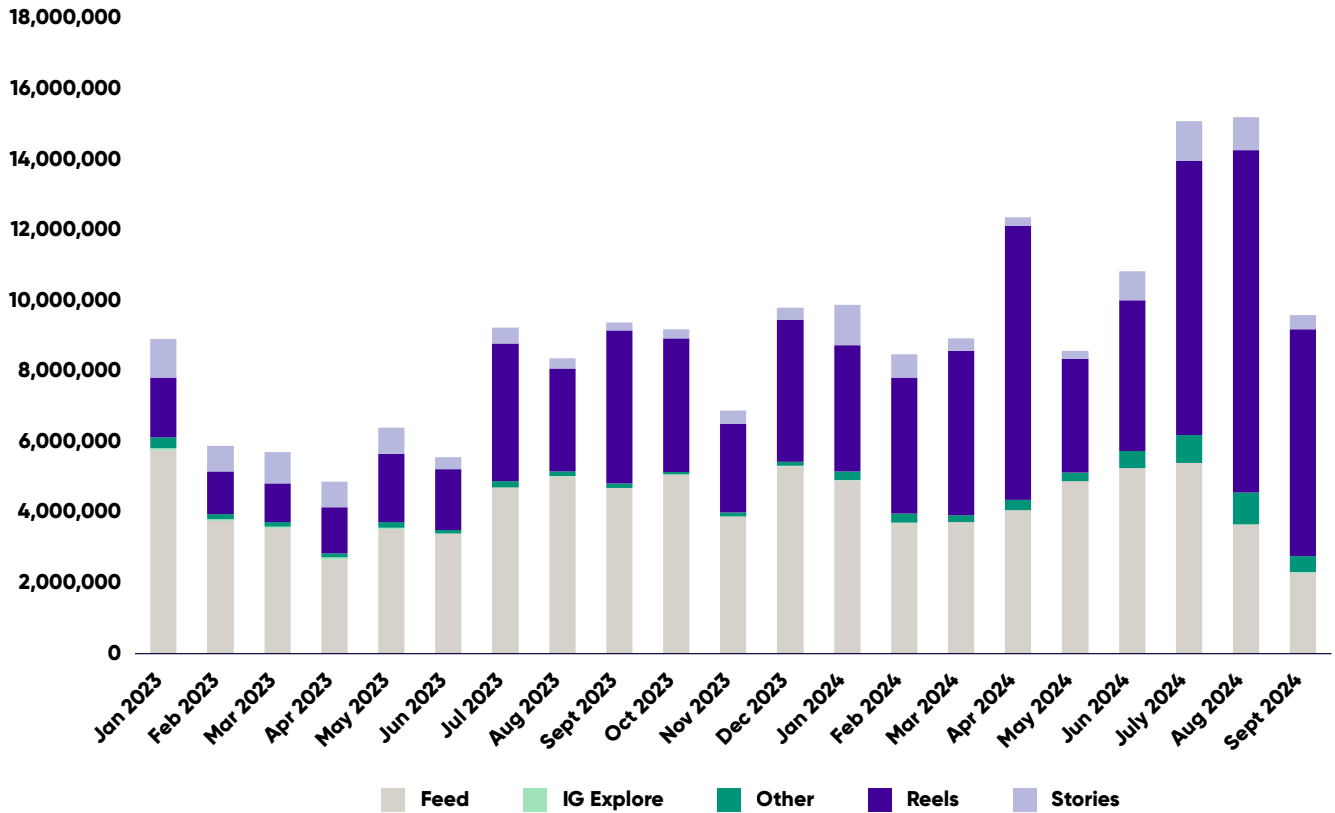
Source: EducationDynamics Proprietary Data



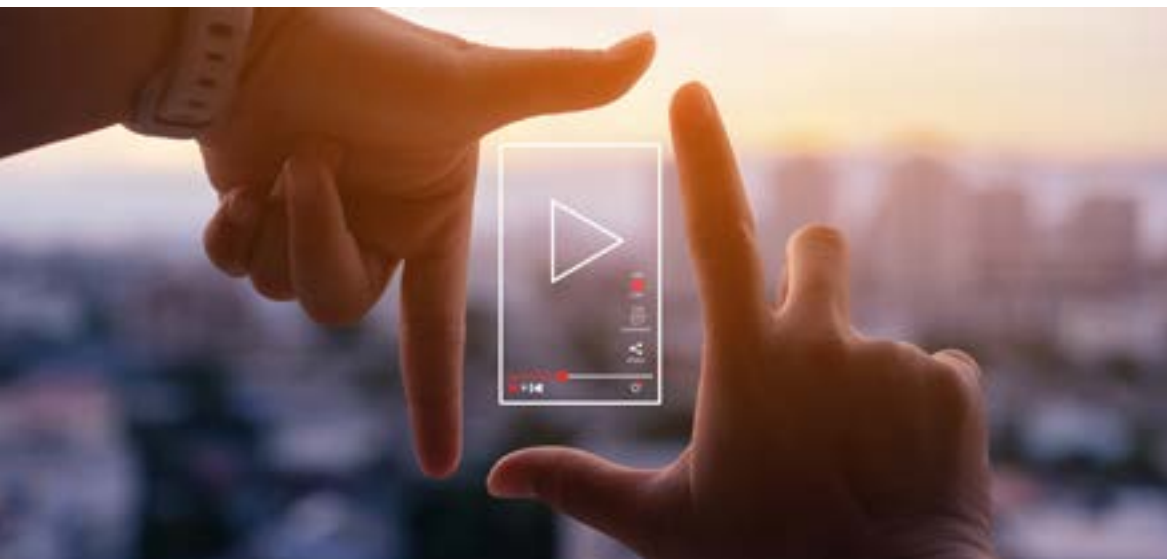


Reels have emerged as the leading format for video consumption among users. This short-form video feature captivates audiences with its engaging and dynamic content, making it an essential tool for brands looking to enhance their visibility and connection with followers. As user preferences continue to shift toward this interactive format, incorporating Reels into social media strategies is vital for staying relevant and effectively reaching prospective students.

### Video Impressions by Placement



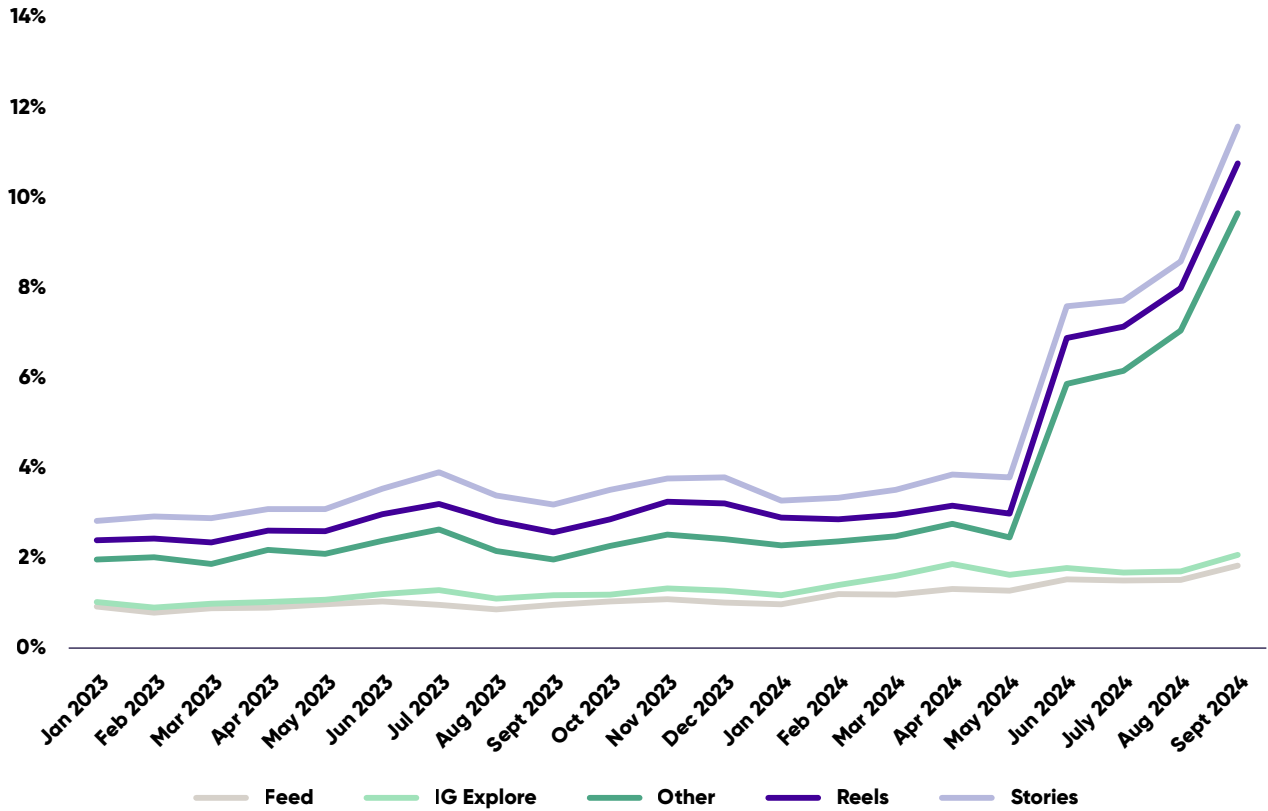
Source: EducationDynamics Proprietary Data



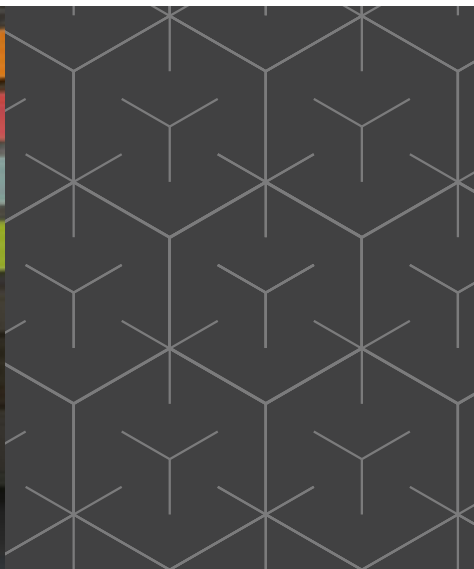


Users are interacting more with videos featured in traditional placements like Reels and Stories. These formats not only capture attention but also encourage engagement through interactive elements such as polls, questions and swipe-ups. This heightened interactivity fosters a stronger connection between education advertisers and their audiences, making them essential tools to enhance reach and drive user engagement.

### Video Click-Through Rate by Placement



Source: EducationDynamics Proprietary Data





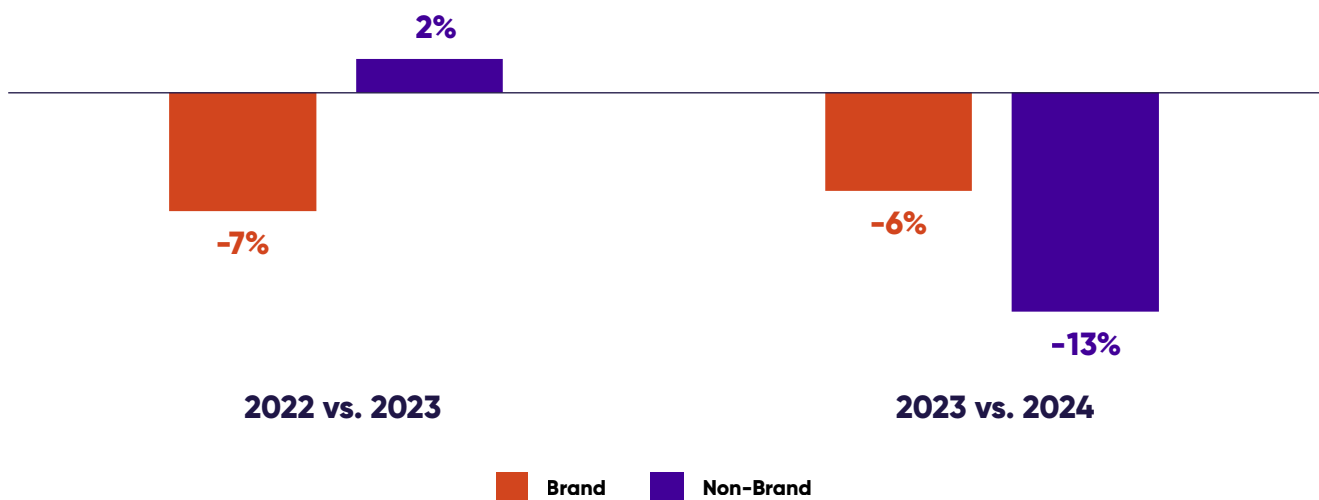
## Paid Search

Understanding the shifts in cost per click (CPC) enables higher education institutions to optimize their paid search strategies. The data below highlights year-over-year changes in CPC for brand and non-brand searches, providing insight into the financial dynamics of these strategies over time.

From 2022 to 2023, non-brand search CPC saw a modest increase of 2%. This growth reflected a slight rise in the cost of bidding on general educational queries or specific programs, likely due to increased competition in these areas. Then, from 2023 to 2024 there was a significant 13% decline in CPC for non-brand searches. This sharp drop suggests that it has become more cost-effective to bid on non-brand terms, which could be due to changes in search behavior, improved ad targeting, or reduced competition.

From 2022 to 2023, there was a 7% decline in CPC for brand searches, suggesting that it became slightly cheaper for institutions to bid on their own brand terms, possibly due to reduced competition or improved ad relevance. That trend continued into 2024 with another 6% decline in CPC for brand searches. Ongoing cost reduction indicates that institutions are maintaining or improving their efficiency in brand bidding, potentially through better targeting or more effective ad copy.

**Year-Over-Year Cost-Per-Click by Campaign Type**

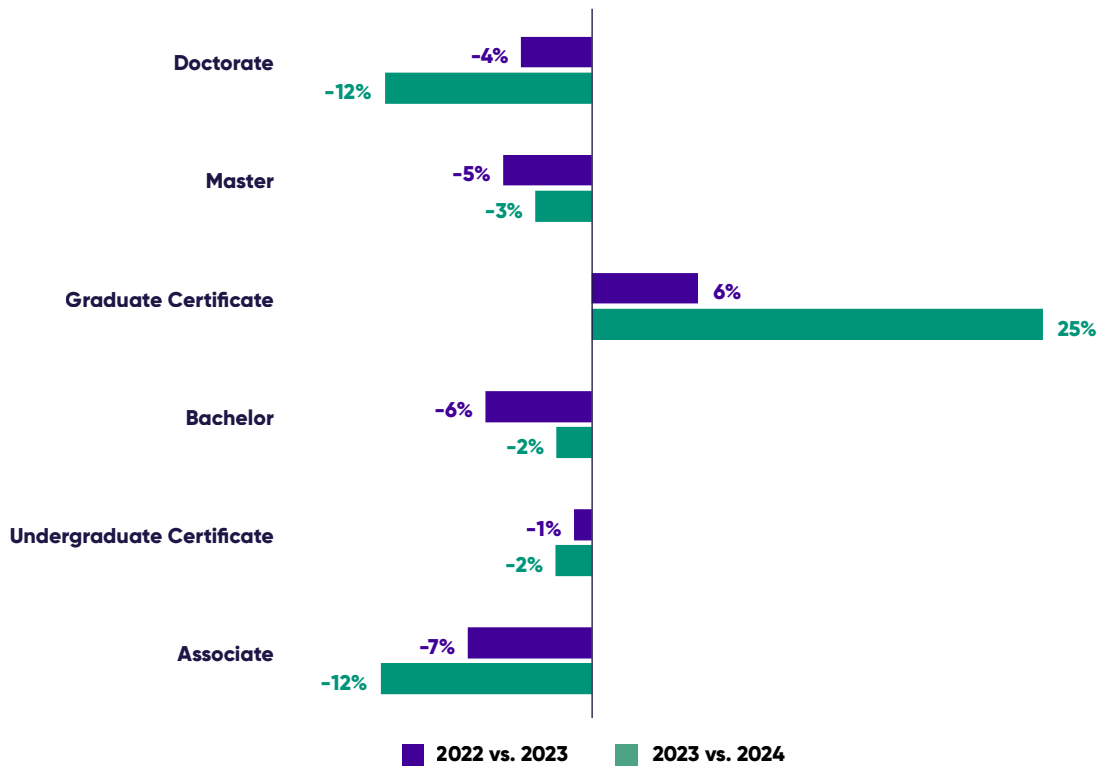


Source: EducationDynamics Proprietary Data



In recent years, the cost per click (CPC) for most degree levels in higher education has declined. Specifically, CPCs for associate degrees dropped by 7% in 2023 and by a further 12% in 2024. Undergraduate certificates saw a slight decrease of 1% in 2023 and 2% in 2024. Bachelor's degrees experienced a 6% reduction in 2023 and a 2% reduction in 2024. Master's degrees followed this trend with a 5% decrease in 2023 and a 3% decrease in 2024, while Doctorate degrees dropped 4% in 2023 and a more significant 12% in 2024. Graduate certificates bucked this trend, with CPCs increasing by 6% in 2023 and a substantial 25% in 2024. This divergence highlights a growing interest and investment in specialized, shorter-term educational credentials.

### Year-Over-Year Cost-Per-Click by Degree Level



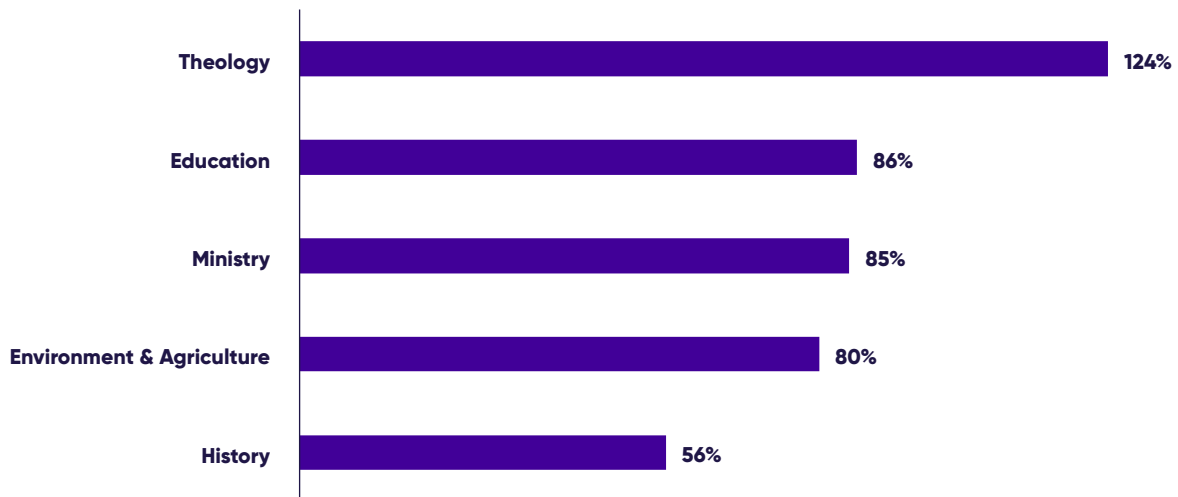
Source: EducationDynamics Proprietary Data





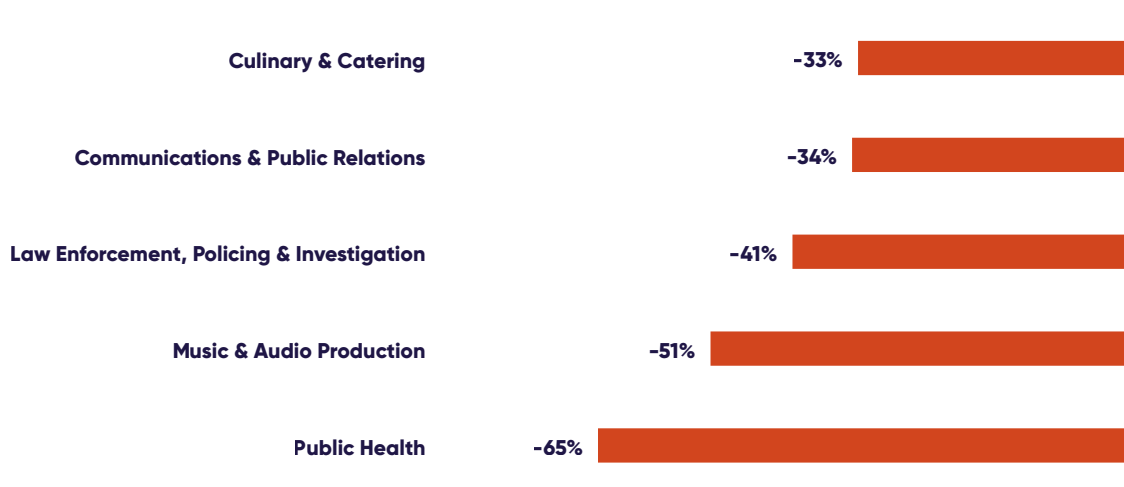
The dynamics of supply and demand in the education market directly impact advertising costs, reflecting the shifting priorities and interests of both institutions and students. CPCs can be a result of advertiser aggressiveness in particular areas, and we can see advertisers get more aggressive (driving up CPCs) when demand declines, as these advertisers are now competing for a smaller pool of interested prospective students. Ultimately, CPC trends are very dynamic and influenced by many factors.

### Subject Areas with the Highest Year-Over-Year Cost-Per-Click Increases



Source: EducationDynamics Proprietary Data

### Subject Areas with the Highest Year-Over-Year Cost-Per-Click Decreases



Source: EducationDynamics Proprietary Data



## Google Performance Max Improves Cost-Per-Application

Performance Max (PMax) is an advanced Google campaign type, designed to leverage machine learning to enhance ad performance across multiple Google channels, including Search, Display, YouTube, Gmail and Discovery. PMax allows advertisers to manage ads across various formats and placements from a single campaign, thereby streamlining the advertising process.

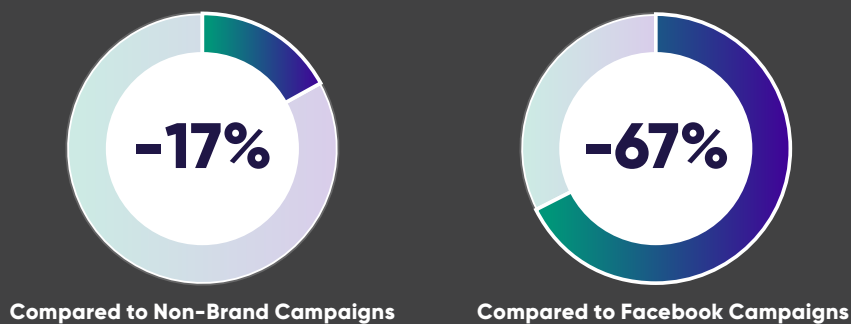
### Considerations for Education Advertisers

- Data Requirements:** To fully leverage Performance Max, education advertisers should have sufficient historical data or first-party data to help guide the algorithm in optimizing campaigns. To ensure that the campaign targets the right audience effectively, this data should represent users who converted into qualified inquiries or applications.

By utilizing Performance Max, educational institutions can enhance their visibility and engagement across the entire Google ecosystem, making it easier to attract and retain prospective students.

On average, PMax campaigns achieved a lower Cost-Per-Application than Non-Brand paid search and Facebook Campaigns in 2024.

### Performance Max Campaign Performance, Cost-Per-Application Comparisons



Source: EducationDynamics Proprietary Data

# Enrollment Management

## Building a Brand Experience that Fuels Enrollment

Modern Learners are rewriting the rules of higher education, seeking personalized experiences that align with their unique goals. This shift demands a new approach to enrollment, one that moves beyond traditional strategies. Enrollment management professionals must tell a compelling story that resonates with each prospective student's aspirations, guiding them through the enrollment process.

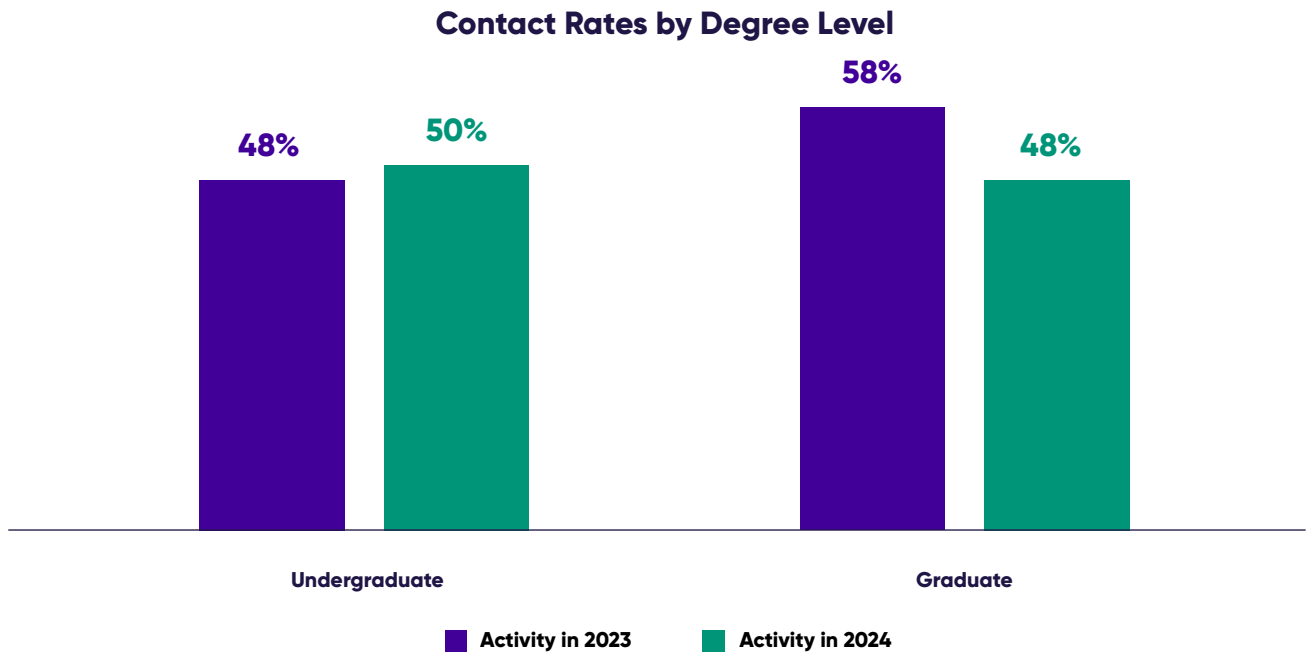
By crafting a cohesive and compelling narrative built upon data analytics and evolving trends, institutions can create a unified brand experience that resonates with Modern Learners. This integrated approach will ultimately engage them and drive enrollment, so institutions can remain competitive in the evolving landscape of higher education.





# Contact Rates

While we see higher contact rates for undergraduate programs, this year we have seen a decline amongst graduate programs.



Source: EducationDynamics Proprietary Data





# Conclusion & Recommendations

As we navigate the evolving landscape of higher education marketing, it is clear that institutions must adopt innovative strategies to stay competitive and effectively engage with prospective students. By understanding the key trends and adapting to the changing preferences of the Modern Learner, institutions can enhance their marketing efforts and achieve better outcomes.

1. Create an integrated marketing and communications approach across your entire campus and all your audiences

/ Look across the institution to understand what makes you distinct. An effective brand proposition is authentic and universal.

/ Successful campuses are student centric in their approach.

2. Implement Comprehensive Marketing Strategies

/ **Channel Diversification:** Employ a multifaceted approach by integrating both traditional and digital platforms to effectively engage prospective students. This includes leveraging social media, email campaigns, and podcasts.

3. Harness Cutting-Edge Technologies

/ **Artificial Intelligence and Chatbots:** Integrate AI-driven solutions within your digital platforms, including search engines (for algorithm optimization) and website chatbots, to provide immediate assistance and information. This not only enhances user experience but also fosters greater engagement and improved performance metrics.

4. Elevate Personalization Efforts

/ **Customized Content Creation:** Develop marketing initiatives finely tuned to the distinct needs and aspirations of various student demographics. Utilize dynamic content on your website and in email communications to resonate with individual interests and preferences.

5. Adopt a Data-Driven Approach

/ **Utilization of Analytics:** Employ data analytics to gain insights into student behaviors, preferences and emerging trends. These insights should inform the refinement of marketing strategies, enabling targeted outreach to specific demographic groups.



# Conclusion & Recommendations continued

## 6. Maintain Agility and Responsiveness

**/ Strategic Adaptation:** Cultivate a readiness to adjust marketing strategies in response to evolving trends. This flexibility empowers marketing to remain relevant in a rapidly changing educational landscape.

## 7. Prioritize Content Personalization

**/ Segmented Communication:** Tailor messaging to address the unique needs and preferences of different audience segments throughout the student journey. This targeted approach fosters deeper connections and enhances overall engagement.

A Unified Enrollment Approach integrates marketing and communications across programs and reaches all audiences regardless of age. Applying these seven strategies keeps institutions agile and competitive as the Modern Learner continues to reshape the higher education landscape in 2025 and beyond.